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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 000434

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [TU](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: SARGSIAN SETS OCTOBER AS DEADLINE FOR TURKEY
RAPPROCHEMENT

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Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) In their first meeting, President Sargsian told A/S Gordon that October 2009 was his deadline for the GOT to respond concretely to his rapprochement initiative. On resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, Sargsian stated Armenia was ready to move forward, but Azerbaijan's leadership was sending signals it was not. He said he hoped for a positive decision from the MCC board on renewing the rural roads program, declaring that MCC was more significant politically than economically to Armenia. Sargsian likewise renewed his commitment to strengthening Armenia's export controls. A/S Gordon applauded Sargsian's foreign policy boldness, and emphasized that progress on NK would help the normalization process with Turkey. While appreciating the political importance that Armenia attaches to MCC, A/S Gordon said the MCC Board would make its decision based on Armenia meeting -- or not -- its eligibility criteria. A/S Gordon and Ambassador Yovanovitch alike expressed concern over the conduct of Yerevan's recent mayoral election. END SUMMARY.

OCTOBER SOCCER MATCH IS DEADLINE FOR GOT RESPONSE

12. (C) On June 9, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Dr. Philip Gordon met with President Sargsian during his first visit to Armenia. Ambassador Yovanovitch and a note-taker accompanied A/S Gordon on the visit, which took place at Armenia's Presidency. Foreign Minister Nalbandian, Deputy Chief of Staff Vigen Sargsian (no relation) and others accompanied President Sargsian.

13. (C) Sargsian betrayed frustration with the GOT over the slow manner in which negotiations for normalization were taking place. He said that "the process cannot be open-ended," and that the "natural end" or deadline for the GOT to respond with concrete steps is this October, when Armenia's national soccer team travels to Turkey for their return World Cup qualifying match. (Note: Turkey's national team traveled to Yerevan in September 2008, along with President Gul, at which time Armenia's secret negotiations with Turkey to normalize relations were made public. End Note.)

14. (C) Sargsian said "we have a real desire to normalize relations" with Turkey, but if the GOT is not ready to reciprocate, "I cannot add anything." He said the GOT's failure to respond to Armenia's initiative was "making life more complicated," and that he had probably "miscalculated" Turkey's interests in normalization with Armenia. President Sargsian said that if his initiative fails, it will

discourage other similar initiatives, "at both the political level and at the level of Armenian society." Sargsian said that if the initiative fails, "we will have to say very loudly that Armenia showed goodwill that was not accepted" by Turkey.

15. (C) A/S Gordon said he, President Obama and Secretary Clinton all appreciated the risk that Sargsian had taken in pursuing rapprochement, and encouraged him to stay the course even in difficult times. Sargsian nodded in agreement when A/S Gordon declared that history will judge Armenia, Turkey, and the United States "harshly" if all three fail to see rapprochement through. A/S Gordon disagreed with Sargsian that Turkey was not really interested in normalization and was merely exploiting the Turkey-Armenian talks to blunt "genocide" recognition efforts by the US Congress. A/S Gordon emphasized that progress on NK negotiations would help the GOT dispel the perception of domestic critics and the Azerbaijani leadership that Armenia would harden its position on an NK settlement once it got Turkey to agree to normalization -- a perception he said came out of the May 7 Prague talks between Sargsian and President Aliyev.

16. (C) Sargsian said he understood Turkey had its own domestic political hurdles to cross, but that these did not exceed Armenia's, and that the GOT should have anticipated them before they entered the process. Sargsian also questioned the linkage the GOT was making between new progress on NK and Turkey-Armenian normalization, wondering out loud, "Does this means the Turks want to settle NK more than we do?" Sargsian said that neither side should "impose their perceptions on others," and that the Turks' linkage called into question their true commitment to Turkish-Armenian normalization. A/S Gordon said the United States had been clear all along in its opposition to any

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linkages between NK and rapprochement, but that the only way for Armenia to see if Turkey was telling the truth was to call their bluff by proceeding with normalization as long as it could.

DISTRUST OF ALIYEV

17. (C) Sargsian told A/S Gordon that his impression after his recent -- and fifth -- meeting with President Aliyev in St. Petersburg was that Aliyev was not committed to the Madrid principles as "the track that we all have adopted" to settle the NK conflict. Sargsian said he thought Azerbaijan's actions -- before and after each round of meetings -- were focused on painting Armenia in a negative light. As examples, Sargsian pointed to the difference between Aliyev's constructive remarks during their meetings and the critical statements that his presidential staff makes about their meetings afterwards. He said that Azerbaijan had also recently ended the practice of returning soldiers who had "trespassed" across the front lines, and rebuffed Armenia's offer to pull back snipers from both sides. Sargsian said he was taken aback by Aliyev's response to these issues, with Aliyev reportedly saying the critical press statements were done without his knowledge, and by people he had appointed and not yet managed to dismiss. On the snipers and holding of Armenian soldiers, Aliyev allegedly said they did this in order to discourage Armenia from maintaining the status quo.

18. (C) A/S Gordon stressed the importance of the Madrid principles, and the equal weight the U.S. attached to territorial integrity, self-determination, and non-use of force in the settlement process. He acknowledged the difficulty of the current negotiations, but said that both sides were closing in on an agreement that was in everyone's best interests. He encouraged Sargsian to do his utmost to make headway on the remaining issues, and that President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and he were personally committed to

supporting a breakthrough in the settlement process.

SARGSIAN RAISES MCC

¶9. (C) Sargsian said he personally wished for the MCC to continue, and that the program carried more political significance for Armenia than economic. A/S Gordon said Secretary Clinton appreciated the economic importance and political significance of the MCC program to Armenia, as she had made clear in her recent letter to the president on the subject. The MCC board, however, was an independent body that had a stake in preserving the integrity of the MCC program, and that it remained unclear what they would decide.

¶10. (C) However, A/S Gordon told Sargsian that the best that Armenia could expect from the June 10 board meeting was not a resumption of the suspended roads project, but a continuing hold on the road funding. A/S Gordon said it was possible that the MCC board might even outright suspend or terminate the program, particularly in light of the irregularities observed in Yerevan's recent mayoral election. Apparently taken aback by this, Sargsian asked A/S Gordon, "were the elections really that bad" as to merit such an outcome? A/S Gordon said the reported irregularities were a concern, and could be one of the factors the board would consider. The Ambassador added that Embassy observers had observed irregularities in multiple districts throughout Yerevan during both the vote and vote count -- not just in one of them. (Note: Immediately following the election, Sargsian issued a statement acknowledging fraud in one of Yerevan's 13 electoral districts, but calling the election an overall "step forward" in democratization. End Note.) A/S Gordon stressed that for the MCC to succeed in Armenia, the MCC Board needed Armenia to help it make a positive judgment on Armenia meeting its eligibility criteria.

COMMITTED TO STRENGTHENED EXPORT CONTROLS

¶11. (C) A/S Gordon told President Sargsian that the export control issue remained at the top of Washington's attention, and if addressed properly, would go a long way to strengthening bilateral ties. Sargsian responded that strengthening export controls and border security "is in Armenia's interests," and that the Armenian government was committed to carrying out "every letter" of the Joint Action Plan it had signed. He said that if there was a problem in the way Armenia was carrying out its commitment, Armenia

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wanted to know, and was willing to address such problems.

¶12. (U) EUR A/S Gordon has approved this cable.
YOVANOVITCH